



**Manchester
Metropolitan
University**

Raje, Fiona ORCID logoORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3267-5526>
(2006) The internet: connectivity to local people and for local people. European Spatial Research and Policy, 13 (1). pp. 133-149. ISSN 1231-1952

Downloaded from: <https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk/627566/>

Version: Published Version

Publisher: De Gruyter Open

Please cite the published version

<https://e-space.mmu.ac.uk>

Fiona RAJÉ*

THE INTERNET: CONNECTIVITY TO LOCAL PEOPLE AND FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

Abstract: This paper explores the use of the Internet for developing insights into accessibility and mobility on two levels: (a) as a research tool and (b) as a source of transport information. The paper is based on research carried out in Oxfordshire in the United Kingdom between 2002 and 2005. While much of the empirical research was based on traditional qualitative techniques such as focus groups and semi-structured interviews, web-based materials were also analysed to explore local opinion on transport and used as resources to test the availability of transport and travel information.

The paper is in two main sections. The first section describes the use of web-based materials as a source of understandings about local transport concerns. The second section looks at the potential of web-based materials for facilitating ease of journey-planning and the barriers to attaining such objectives. The paper is intended to open up new approaches to developing insights into community and individual experience of transport such as the use of 'electronic talk', as well as highlighting ways in which available web-based information may be effectively harnessed to contribute to improved accessibility.

1. LOCAL TALK, LOCAL CONCERNS

Web-based sources of data have been largely untapped in transport research and, arguably, using such resources may be viewed as lacking in the rigour of traditional, quantitative approaches employing instruments such as travel diaries and questionnaires. However, the Internet provides the researcher with a path into a locality which can be more effective in generating information than direct

* Fiona RAJÉ, University of Oxford, Transport Studies, e-mail: fiona.raje@ouce.ox.ac.uk

approaches to potential participants may be.¹ Internet forums can provide data that may be hidden from the researcher during discussion-based approaches such as interviews and focus groups and can supply information that quantitative methods are not designed to obtain. The following examples taken from the work in Oxfordshire describe the usefulness of 'electronic talk' in developing local understandings and are chosen to illustrate the potential of analysis of web-based forums.

During the period when fieldwork was being conducted in Charlbury, one of the main concerns being voiced by residents was about the relocation of the Co-op store to a new, larger site within the town. People were concerned about traffic impacts of the relocation as well as the possible effects on local small businesses of the expansion of the supermarket's services. The discussions of the proposal on the Charlbury Internet forum (<http://www.charlbury.info/>) provide an indicator of the types of travel decisions residents were making prior to the store's relocation and expansion in late 2004. For example, in a contribution made in May 2004, a local resident writes that she travels by car to the town of Witney (approximately 15 minutes away) for food shopping and, consequently since she is there, she also buys incidentals such as newspapers which she could have bought at home in Charlbury:

I think the big question people need to be asking here is do we want Charlbury residents to do their weeks shopping in Witney or in Cahrlbury (*sic*)? My husband and I go to Witney and 'as we are there' we pop to newsagents in Witney to buy our magazines, thus losing News and Things the chance of a sale. We might go to a Witney butchers or buy our lottery tickets in Smiths, our sons nappies in Boots, there again, losing Fiveways (local shop in Charlbury) and the butchers and chemists a sale. With the new Co-op I will do all my shopping here in the Town and that will mean using *all* of Charlbury's shops more regularly. My car being at Spendlove (car park in Charlbury) will not add impact because it is quite often parked there when visiting the vets or Dr's surgery.

We are not adding a Boots or WH Smiths, or even a Tesco superstore, all that is happening is our existing Co-op is moving to more suitable premises. 2 shops already sell magazines, 4 sell bread ... is it really likely that the Co-op growing in size will actually put these people out of business? It is blocking

¹ Some of the experiences of the researcher in carrying out this study help illustrate the challenges associated with direct approaches to potential participants. While 68 participants made a personal contribution to the empirical research in Barton and Charlbury through either interview, focus group participation or web forum input, over the period of study in both areas, more than 200 people were approached directly in person at a number of venues and on street by the researcher and asked to participate. This does not include the 200 households in Barton and 100 in Charlbury where letters inviting people to participate were also distributed which yielded no response.

the Co-op that will lose any chance we have of viability (*sic*), giving out the message that residents do not need shops. Well we do. If people want more art galleries or an antiques shop or 3, then fine, let Charlbury fade into a dormitory town where the residents are all weekenders and the only visitors are ramblers. I would rather see people live their whole lives here (as I have) and see visitors here being people from Finstock and Fawler (nearby villages) who are coming to use our Co-op and our other shops (<http://www.charlbury.info/>, accessed 20/09/04).

This quote is instructive as it implies how residents' patterns of trip-making may threaten the viability of rural retail activity. The availability of a car to the couple above allows them to make the journey to another town on a regular basis for shopping. It is difficult to determine from the quotation whether the availability of the car is the primary reason why they choose to travel to Witney or whether the perceived lack of suitable sources of goods in Charlbury caused them to search for alternative shopping locations. Indeed, it may be that some other factor comes into play in the decision to go to Witney regularly such as combining the shopping trip with a visit to relatives. However, it may be inferred, from the suggestion by the writer of the quote, that she would shop locally if the new supermarket was open, that the lack of sufficient availability of goods at present appears to be an important driver of her trip-making decision.

This provokes related, wider concerns: does being cognisant of the availability of a car make an individual more selective about the choices they can make with respect to accessing the accoutrements of daily life? Do people search more extensively through a number of options and destinations because they are more mobile as a result of car availability? How does the availability of the car to some residents (and the subsequent range of decisions they can make) affect the choices offered to residents who do not have access to a car? Are these residents more vulnerable to the vagaries of those with cars whose actions may ultimately result in the loss of local services through loss of revenue and low levels of usage? These questions all relate to the issue of transport and, often hidden, social exclusion in rural areas where some residents without cars find trip-making and access to services particularly difficult:

I oppose the idea of moving the bus route in order to generate parking spaces apparently championed in these (web)pages, by those who no doubt have a car to use. Older people do not all have cars and find it hard to walk longer distances. Young people such as my stepson would have been unable to get to work without the buses. If you wanted more parking spaces then why not look for a residence with such before moving to your current and presumably unsatisfactory home (Contributor to Charlbury Forum, August 2004, commenting on a call for removal of buses running through the town available at <http://www.charlbury.info/>, accessed 22/09/04).

For those without cars available in the quote above, the writer points to the difficulties of accessibility that can result. The quote highlights the potential for suppression of trips, in this case his stepson's employment journeys, when public transport is unavailable. This theme would not to be captured by a travel diary. Qualitative approaches such as interviews and focus groups are more likely to garner insights like this and 'eavesdropping' (Grieco 2006) on electronic talk complements such approaches.

Turning now to another important transport issue in Charlbury, during the period of study the franchise for bus services from the town was lost by Worths buses of Enstone (nearby local village) to the national company, Stagecoach. Prior to the announcement of the change, people had given accounts of their reasons for satisfaction with the services provided by Worths to the researcher during interviews. They perceived the service as reliable – 'it gets you home even in the snow' (55-year-old female interviewee) – and suggested that the drivers made every effort to meet their needs as often as possible.

When the changes to the services were announced, expressions of consternation were made by bus users as the following quotes from the Internet forum indicate:

It is worrying, at first glance, to see the County (Council) neglecting local family businesses in favour of the conglomerate that is Stagecoach, with their questionable background and not entirely reliable reputation. How on earth did this happen? (Contributor 1, Thursday 14th October 2004)

I just hope this does not harm Worths. That wonderful company has faithfully served Charlbury all my life and long before, and I for one would have voted to keep them every time. Stagecoach are a national company with no interest in us what so ever and nothing to lose financially by providing a dubious service, Worths on the other hand are in Enstone and knew that if the service was lacking then we would come and tell them so! And I have never had to! Stagecoach Oxford on the other hand have offered me, late busses (*sic*), rude drivers, bad drivers, route alterations with no notice, time alterations with no notice and so many cancelled busses (*sic*) it is a shame. Thank you OCC (Oxfordshire County Council) for rewarding all of Worths' hard work over the last god knows how many years with chucking them over in favour of a company that does not interest, or need the money. Typical of England nowadays (Contributor 2, Saturday 16th October 2004).

Not a bad frequency, but a shame that only Chippy (nearby town of Chipping Norton) gets the late night buses. It would be better if the last bus of the day (23.40 out of Oxford) could detour *via* Charlbury (Contributor 3, Saturday 4th December 2004).

Well, the revised timetable has more buses on weekdays, but fewer in the peak times. This alone makes the bus less useful to me (daily user of the 70

service). I wonder if December 13th will also see a marked increase in fares? I also worry about reliability, Worths have failed me once in over 3 years ... with a swift follow up apology. I know of colleagues in Woodstock and Begbroke who chose the Worths bus rather than the current Stagecoach due to the unreliable service. I will give the new service a fair chance ... I have no alternative but their customer service will hear from me if they fail to live up to the service we have received from Worths (Contributor 4, Friday 10th December 2004) (quotes from charlbury.info forum 'Stagecoach', accessed 13/12/04).

These views suggest that local people feel that decisions have been made that affect them without their involvement in the decision-making process. The comments also highlight the issues that these participants deem to be important when using a bus service: reliability, services at the times they would like to/need to travel, safety and fares. It is also important that they perceive that the small, local operator cares for their needs whereas they have doubts about the interest of the national operator in local people, suggesting that company is more concerned about financial gain than people.

While it may have been possible to obtain this range of opinion about the bus service changes in Charlbury through other qualitative approaches, the contributions to the electronic forum provide a depth of readily-available information and capture a sense of local opinion. The strength of the Internet is the facility with which it provides the user with a conduit to local concerns. This connectivity offers the researcher an additional resource to complement more intensive techniques they may be employing in building their understandings of accessibility and mobility issues in communities.

It was not only the bus operator that changed during the study period. The train services through Charlbury became the responsibility of a new train operating company with First Great Western Link replacing Thames Trains. Subsequently, after a timetable change towards the end of 2004, there were increased reports of unreliability and information failure. In an entry to the Internet-based forum entitled 'Railway reliability collapses' one resident sums up the problems experienced:

One month after the introduction of a new timetable, Charlbury's rail service has seen a drastic fall in reliability. Though the newly-introduced trains are more comfortable, they have proved unable to keep to time, causing knock-on delays on the single-line railway. On occasion, the stop at Charlbury has even been omitted so the train can make up time. Passengers have been turfed out at Oxford and told to wait for the following train.

Train breakdowns and unadvertised closures for engineering work have accentuated the misery. Indeed, the service got off to a bad start on its first day

This train duly arrived and some 400 people struggled to get on board, to such an extent that the Senior Conductor deemed it to be an unsafe situation. Requests were made for some people to get off, but nobody moved. Even a threat that the train would go no further unless some got off was ignored and passengers sat (or stood) tight. Eventually, a 3-car train was produced and passengers then transferred to it, but even so, some still had to be left behind when the train departed some 40 minutes late, having blocked platform 2 at the station for this period. This effectively delayed trains on the Cotswold Line for the remainder of the evening (Cotswold Line Promotion Group, 14 January 2005, <http://www.clpg.co.uk/newspassenger%20revolt.htm>, accessed 17/01/05).

The experiences of users of the Cotswold Line were raised at a House of Commons debate on rail timetables by the local Member of Parliament, David Cameron, at the beginning of February 2005:

Mr. Cameron: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply but is he aware that, on the Cotswold line, the new timetable has been a disaster? A daily commuter who lives in **Charlbury** wrote to me to say that her trains arrived on time only twice in the first four weeks of the new timetable's operation. Some trains did not stop at the advertised stations, and overcrowding, lateness and delays have become endemic. Will the right hon. Gentleman look at that line specifically and help ensure that timetables in rural areas are both deliverable and delivered? Is he aware that there is a suspicion in those areas that the new timetables favour urban areas and let down rural commuters such as my constituent?

Mr. Darling: The Hon. Gentleman's latter point is not correct, but performance on the Cotswold line since the changes has been lamentable and is totally unacceptable. I have been given a long explanation as to why that is, but, unless the hon. Gentleman is a trainspotter, I shall save him from listening to me reading it out. The long and short of the matter is that the problems are capable of being fixed and First Great Western is in the process of doing so (Hansard, 1st February 2005, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/cgibin/ukparl_hl?DB=ukparl&STEMMER=en&WORDS=charlburi+&COLOUR=Red&STYLE=sURL=/pa/cm200405/cmhansrd/cm050201/debtext/5020104.htm#5020104_spnew6, accessed 25/02/05).

The dissatisfaction expressed in the quotes above and previously about the quality of public transport services in Charlbury indicates that there are issues that need to be addressed by the operators and the County Council. In a community where car ownership levels are high,² there is a potential for many of those who are disenchanted with bus and rail services to become even

² According to the 2001 Census, 26.8% of households in England did not have a car and in Oxfordshire 18.2% did not. However, in Charlbury, 12.9% of households did not have a car, i.e. 87% of household had at least one car.

more dependent upon car travel, if they have access to a car. This works counter to the local authority's policy of promoting non-car modes (Oxfordshire County Council 2000, 2005) and points to the need for integrated planning and proactive management of transport to meet the daily needs of the system user reliably.

In a rural town such as Charlbury, some residents appear to be particularly motivated to use public transport, having moved to the area specifically because of the railway station being there:

One of the reasons we chose to live in Charlbury is that it has a train station. It is possible to live here without a car and, even if we had a car, we would not have to use it for work. I work from home and Laura gets the train to Oxford. (30-year-old male who moved to Charlbury in June 2004)

Several people moved to Charlbury because it has a train station. I did 4 years ago when I commuted to London for 6 months until I found a job in Oxford. I was a member of Friends of the Earth and used to take my bike with me on the train to London (36-year-old male who moved to Charlbury in 2000).

However, habit can be a major inhibitor of behavioural change. Individuals settle into routines of travel behaviour in terms of the trips they make, the modes they use, the destinations they visit and so on, that become habitual and entrenched (Stanbridge, 2002). Losing the patronage of people who were motivated to use public transport, as a result of operational changes and poor service quality may mean that, if they are not part of a captive market (i.e. those who have no alternative but to use public transport), they are permanently lost as public transport users to car-based travel. By extension, loss of patronage may result in loss of services which are no longer financially viable and a net increase in travel-induced social isolation of residents, through withdrawal of services, may occur.

As we have seen, the voices expressed on the Internet forum above have been helpful in pointing to some of the transport issues that were preoccupying local people over the period of the empirical research. The web-based forum contributions provided a greater level of understanding of local accessibility and mobility issues in the study community than obtained solely through interviews. The 'electronic chat' also alerted the researcher to concerns which had not been expressed during other interaction with participants.

A snapshot analysis of the postings on this forum (box 1) illustrates the potential of the web-based forum for generating local understandings.

Box 1. 'Listening' to electronic 'chat': using an Internet forum to understand local concerns

The potential of electronic 'chat'

In an effort to obtain an insight into the types of topics and particularly transport topics that concerned residents of Charlbury, the web-based forum on the Charlbury information website was a valuable resource. This naturally occurring electronic talk made relatively frequent reference to transport issues and provided another useful insight into people's concerns which complemented the interviews which were also carried out. If we accept that people tend to talk about an issue when it is of concern to them, the examination of electronic sources is considered to be helpful in developing a sense of concerns amongst a community. Also, as postings to discussion groups are dated, changes in concerns over time may be revealed.

All postings to the forum between 6th March 2003 and 28th January 2005 were analysed with a view to exploring the value of electronic discussion groups to develop local understandings. During this 23 month period, there were 133 topics posted on the discussion group. Amongst several issues raised, 16 of these topics were directly related to transport. This does not include those postings that related to vandalism of cars in the area. The 16 transport topics were made up of a total of 129 postings with the topics 'Stagecoach', 'The Trains', 'Up to 700 daily movements to and from the proposed new Coop site' and 'Speed Bumps' generating the highest numbers of posts amongst the transport related topics at 22, 21, 21 and 18 respectively. Together these 129 transport-related postings made up the largest number of entries on any one theme. The only other topics yielding similar or higher numbers of postings overall (and thereby serving as a useful barometer for issues generating discussion) were largely related to communication issues (digital radio, broadband, mail). The generator of greatest discussion was 'Earthquake/Tsunami relief' with 33 posts.

Topic	No. of posts
Earthquake/Tsunami relief	33
The play	28
The post again	26
New Co-op	23
Internet Broadband	20
Broadband News	19
Digital radio reception	19
Save the Corner house	19

These findings are interesting not only as an indicator of the transport topics that have taken local interest but also as much for what they do not say. No mention is made on the forum about a proposed home zone in the town although interviews with local people in the area where it is planned suggest that there are concerns about this scheme. The area where the home zone is proposed is made up of local authority housing stock and residents on these two streets have been described by a local councillor anecdotally as being 'poor'. He adds that the people on the other side of the town are seen as the 'nice' people of Charlbury. Using his terminology and reflecting

upon the discussion forum, it may be that this is an example of how the 'connected' make use of tools of connectivity to express their needs and views while the 'poor' or excluded do not have the ability or choose not to avail of such media.

There are examples amongst the postings of local people organising themselves through the forum to make representations to the train operating company about the poor service they feel they are receiving. In this way, the forum acts as an informal meeting place for like-minded individuals who may have, in the past, met at a community centre or been connected through social relationships within the town. Amongst an increasingly-mobile society, several participants in this research stated that they had chosen to live in Charlbury because of its transport connectivity through the train service to London. It follows then that while they may live in the same town, commuters with complaints about their train service may find it much easier to meet those in a similar situation through an electronic medium than they would in seeking out others through other means locally. Thus the electronic forum is being used as an organising tool for the expression of impacts that transport is having on a particular sector of Charlbury's residents. Indirectly and perhaps more subtly, it is also serving to underline the exclusion from this mode of expression of another sector of the town's social mix: that is, the residents of Sturt and Hughes Closes, where the home zone is planned, do not make use of the electronic media to organise a response to an issue which some of them state that they are not supportive of.

2. WEB-BASED TOOLS AND TRANSPORT PLANNING: TWO EXAMPLES

In the previous section, we looked at the types of insights into community and individual transport issues available from Internet sources. In this section, we describe the use of the Internet as an organising tool to help create adjacency between individuals with similar transport needs in a community and as a resource to obtain information to plan a journey.

2.1. Lift-Sharing: Building on Social Capital, Building Social Capital?

Some of the participants in the research in Oxfordshire described their reliance upon friends and relatives for regular and one-off trips:

I come to this shop [local Londis store] to get my bits and pieces but I go to Witney for my main shop. I go with a friend. [Also] my sons live nearby and my grandson. They give me lifts (Retired female non-driver, Sturt Close, Charlbury).

I've got my son to drive me places. I get my daughters to take me to the hospital when I need to go (70-year-old female non-driver, Sturt Close, Charlbury).

My friend comes from another village to take me places (82-year-old female who can no longer drive, Hughes Close, Charlbury).

For some, infirmity and ageing meant they were no longer able to use their car, for others, a car was simply not available to them. The community has responded to some of the social needs of the elderly by providing trips to different homes on a Sunday for tea to those who would not have an opportunity to leave their homes and meet others normally. There is also another community group which gives elderly people lifts to the local memorial hall on a Wednesday for lunch. While provision of such lifts may enable some older people to meet others, the service does not satisfy all their travel needs nor does it meet the travel needs of other local people. The Charlbury Caring Community Car Scheme serves to fill the gap between public transport services and private car journeys by providing a car service for local residents using volunteers with their own cars. Trips are organised on request but tend to be made to hospital and other health care appointments. Anecdotal evidence from a previous study of trip-making to hospitals (Rajé *et al.*, 2003) suggests that there may be a certain amount of stigma amongst young people about using such services. However, through more widespread usage and acceptance of such schemes, they may be mainstreamed and the likelihood of any aversion to using them may be duly lessened.

Another related concept that could help satisfy latent travel needs amongst the rural community of Charlbury is the use of a more formalised model of lift-sharing. During the period of research, a new resident in the area posted a request on the Charlbury information forum about the possibility of travelling with another local person to work outside of Oxfordshire, indicating that there may be a latent demand for shared trip-making. There are a number of websites available in the UK for people to find others with whom they can make both regular and one-off trips. Some of these such as <http://www.mylifts.com/> and <http://www.shareacar.com/> are aimed at commuter trips. A particularly user-friendly website can be found at www.liftshare.org which enables people to make links with other users for all trip types:

You can share a car for any journey – getting to work, doing the weekly shop, taking the children to school, going to the match at the weekend, travelling to a festival, event or show, getting to or from university, visiting friends or getting to the airport (<http://www.liftshare.org/welcome.asp>).

With an active information website already in place in Charlbury at www.charlbury.info, a hyperlink from the community's information site to the lift-share website would be a practical way to facilitate ease of access for potential lift-sharers. The benefits of such an intervention are that it:

- saves you money – travelling with others enables you to reduce your transport costs by up to £1,000 a year;
- reduces the number of cars on the roads – resulting in less congestion, less pollution and fewer parking problems;
- provides a real solution to the transport problems of rural areas;

- gives employees and employers more transport options;
- reduces the need for a private car (<http://www.liftshare.org/welcome.asp>).

It is clear from this study that local people travel to Witney and Chipping Norton regularly. By sharing lifts on these two routes, people would be able to pool together their resources, make trips when public transport was not available and lessen the number of individual car journeys to and from these destinations. An additional benefit would be that by making contact with other people in the local area, new acquaintances may be made, possible friendships formed and there may be positive spin-off effects of increased social networking and development of the community's social capital. In a town such as Charlbury, where there appears to be a barely-hidden chasm between different groups of residents, a lift-sharing scheme could bring together sectors of the community who would not necessarily naturally find a common focus with a spin-off effect of helping to instil a sense of community pride amongst those involved.

2.2. The Potential of Personalised Travel Planning

Individualised travel marketing such as TravelSmart³ programmes arose from a desire to encourage modal shift (DfT, 2002) by presenting individuals who were seen to be open to change with alternative travel options. A vignette from this research (box 2) points to the potential of personalized travel planning for wider and more prosaic applications, not as a catalyst for modal change but as a way of encouraging people who walk, cycle and use public transport to

³ Sustrans, the UK sustainable transport charity, describes TravelSmart programmes 'as ways to change the way we travel'. Sustrans states that TravelSmart is a cost-effective technique for increasing walking, cycling and use of public transport – thereby reducing car travel. It delivers real change by making people more aware of their daily travel choices through a process known as Individualised Marketing. Sustrans states that 'Individualised Marketing is an innovative approach to changing travel behaviour through direct contact with households. It encourages people to make greater use of alternatives to car travel by offering them personalised travel information, advice and incentives to try out new ways of getting around' (<http://www.sustrans.org.uk/default.asp?sID=1091003006653&pID=> and <http://www.sustrans.org.uk/default.asp?sID=1090849616969>, accessed 27/07/05). While in its relative infancy in the UK, TravelSmart Australia has been in operation for a number of years. This initiative brings together the many community and government based programs that are asking Australians to use alternatives to traveling in their private car. The TravelSmart Australia website gives an overview of its approach: TravelSmart asks you to think about your travel needs. Use alternative transport to the car, for example using walking, cycling and public transport. Reduce the negative impacts of the car on traffic congestion and air pollution. Recognise the health benefits of incidental exercise such as walking or cycling. Choose shops and facilities that are near you to reduce the need to travel and to support your local businesses (<http://www.travelmart.gov.au/about.html>, accessed 26/07/05).

broaden their knowledge of what is accessible along the transport corridors that are currently available to them.

* Box 2. A candidate for personalised travel planning?

Participant 1's story

Participant 1 is a 21 year old white single mother of two African Caribbean/white children. She and her children moved back to the urban peripheral estate of Barton in November 2003 after she split up with her boyfriend in Carterton, West Oxfordshire. She chose to go back to the area where she had grown up, although she had also been offered housing in Summertown or Headington (both areas seen as considerably more desirable to Oxford residents than Barton), because she has family and friends there. She also felt that people may have been 'racist' in other places '... but people don't mind around here that the children are mixed'. As a mother of two boys under five, life is not easy and time is particularly precious. Yet, Participant 1 fits in work as a volunteer on the estate and tries to go to the gym in the evenings as often as possible. Her gym trips are very much dependent on a babysitter's availability and she negotiates the timing of these trips around the babysitter's schedule. Sometimes she calls on her mother to help out. Going to the gym involves a bus ride towards the city centre but she is happy to travel because it gives her some time to herself. For food shopping, she does not like to go to the Co-op or Somerfield in Headington because she feels they are expensive and it is not easy to carry heavy bags on the bus from these shops. Instead, she relies on her mother to give her a lift to Asda or Tesco, since both these supermarkets cannot be accessed by bus from her neighbourhood. When asked whether there was anywhere she would like to go to but was unable to because of transport, she expressed some concern that she has not been able to go to the family planning clinic since it moved from Manzil Way, off Cowley Road, in April 2004. The clinic was transferred to the Radcliffe Infirmary site north of Oxford city centre and she feels it is now too difficult to get to.

While the vignette is helpful to illuminate how important social capital and networks can be to the decisions an individual makes around travel, it is used here to illustrate how individual transport knowledge could be supplemented to deal with structural changes which could have far-reaching effects for someone who is already a single mother of two children. Specifically, when Oxford Primary Care Trust moved the family planning clinic in 2004, within five months, there was a 25% reduction in patients using the service (Owen, 2005). Participant 1 was obviously one of the people who agreed with the Primary Care Trust's sexual health development manager's statement.

We now know that clients in east Oxford, and in Rosehill, Barton and Blackbird Leys areas, find it too far to travel to the RI [Radcliffe Infirmary],

and we have found they have not been attending the clinic at its new location (Owen, 2005).

In response to the decline in clinic users, the Trust decided to launch new satellite centres which will open once a week at community centres in east Oxford, Rosehill and Barton. Taking Participant 1's case as an example, however, and without entering the debate on whether the decision to relocate was in the best interest of the key target groups in deprived areas on the east side of Oxford (with high rates of teenage pregnancy – Owen, 2005), Barton is served by buses which travel through the centre of Oxford and north along Banbury Road to Kidlington. Banbury Road is parallel to Woodstock Road where the relocated clinic at the Radcliffe Infirmary is located. Walking from a bus stop on Banbury Road to the Infirmary would take about five minutes. Thus, while Participant 1 perceives that it is too difficult to travel to the new clinic's site, it is likely that she is simply unaware of the location of the clinic in relation to the main bus route from the area where she lives. Indeed, accessing the clinic would not involve the deterrent effect usually associated with the requirement to interchange, something she had done during trips to the former family planning clinic location off Cowley Road. The trip to the new site may be longer in terms of time and distance travelled by bus than a trip to the old location but the new trip would definitely involve less walking or waiting time than the previous journey since there are no direct bus services to Cowley Road from Barton.

For someone like Participant 1, affected by the relocation of an important health care service, it can be argued that there is a call for personalised travel planning. If she had been offered the services of someone at her last visit to the old clinic who could have talked her through the ways in which she could travel to the new site, it is likely that she would not have discounted the new location as too difficult to access because she would have realised that it is within easy walking distance of the main bus route to and from her home. For someone who is already a bus user, personalised approaches to conveying information about destinations that are within easy access of the transport corridor can do much to expand travel horizons. Internet-based travel planning tools are emerging as valuable resources to help furnish the journey-planning information needed to improve people's travel knowledge. A facilitator with access to the Internet could have been able to advise Participant 1 of her travel options to the relocated clinic.

Within the NHS there is a trend towards centralisation of services. Rather than providing photocopied maps of new service locations as appears to be current common practice, it is likely that the services of someone to work out a personalized route to and from the new location would result in a greater acceptance of the service centralisation. Such an approach has been beneficial in the legal sector where there was a danger that a change in service location could

mean a fall in court attendance. Specifically, in Warwickshire, a number of courts have recently been closed. As a result, witnesses may now have to travel to towns they are unfamiliar with to give evidence. An officer within the Witness Care Service has now taken on the responsibility for investigating how a witness may travel to the new site, using a range of travel information sources including the Internet, and provides them with bus and train times where public transport services are available or arranges for taxis from more isolated locations. This role of conduit of information has greatly increased the likelihood that a witness will attend court than if they had to work out themselves how they would need to travel (Representative, Witness Care – Warwickshire, personal interview, March 2005).

With respect to employment, a web-based tool has been developed to link job opportunities with transport opportunities. The EMIRES⁴ project was funded by the European Commission to develop and demonstrate a network of Regional Service Centres offering personalised, dynamically generated packages of intelligent, value added services. One of the project's demonstration sites is located in the Central and East Sutherland area of the Scottish Highlands where a lack of local jobs and lack of transport to work and interviews had been identified as barriers to employment. The EMIRES service was set up for users 'to obtain personalised information on suitable job vacancies that they can get to by public transport (and providing information on the public transport service they need to use)' (www.emires.net accessed 14/08/05). An online prototype of the UK EMIRES Regional Service Centre is available at www.emiresscotland.org.

This application looks at the same lists of Job Vacancies as JobCentre Plus and the same lists of training opportunities as Learn Direct, so it is guaranteed to be current and up to date. It can combine these sources of information with Public Transport data to provide users who rely on public transport with a more focussed and personalised search for jobs and training. Public Transport information is provided by Highland Council data and includes Demand Responsive Transport (DRT), (also known as Dial-a-Ride) services within the East Sutherland area as well as local and intercity fixed route bus and train services. This allows job seekers from outside East Sutherland to gain information on accessible opportunities within the area, as well as allowing local residents to find suitable training and vacancies in neighbouring towns outside the East Sutherland area which they can get to using public transport. If the recommended public transport journey includes DRT (Dial-a-ride) then details of how to book this will be provided. A by product of the system will be management information which will highlight to Local Authority

⁴ Choose shops and facilities that are near you to reduce the need to travel and to support your local businesses (<http://www.travelsmart.gov.au/about.html>, accessed 26/07/05) .

technology available at present. Also, it is necessary for the Transport Direct journey planner to take account of the detrimental impacts of interchange and the nature and undesirability of some walking trips. In addition, there are no directions provided for the person who is advised to walk: if they are using the system, it is likely that they may be unfamiliar with the area and would thus benefit from simple directions. Nevertheless, despite this cautionary tale, the Internet holds great potential for facilitating ease of access to transport and travel information. Such access can expand individual travel horizons and thereby act against prospective exclusion from participation in activities or ability to use key services that locational factors may produce.

3. CONCLUSION

The Internet can create adjacency between researcher and local people and between transport system user and travel information. Analysis of 'electronic talk' can work usefully to complement empirical findings from other methods and also serve as a barometer of local opinion. There is a potential in web-based materials for facilitating ease of journey-making. For example, extending the use of web-based resources such as lift-sharing databases can help make connections between people in communities with similar travel needs. While some travel database tools which are currently available would benefit from degrees of refinement, the Internet provides a platform for the development of efficient tools to facilitate accessibility and social connectivity by promoting effective use of available options for mobility.

REFERENCES

- DfT (2002), *A Review of Personalised Journey Planning Techniques*, London.
- GRIECO, M. (2006), 'Hägerstrand, Hegemony and Distributed Discourse: The Use of the World Wide Web in Tracking Contemporary Migration Paths', *European Spatial Research and Policy*, 13 (1), pp.
- OWEN, V. (2005), 'Mini Family Planning Clinics Set to Open', Oxford Mail.
- Oxfordshire County Council (2000), *Oxfordshire Local Transport Plan (2001–2006)*, Oxford.
- Oxfordshire County Council (2005), *Transaction: Local Transport Plan for Oxfordshire 2006–2011 (Draft 11/04/05)*, Oxford.
- RAJÉ, F., BRAND, C., PRESTON, J. and GRIECO, M. (2003), *Transport and Access to Health Care: Report on Transport and Health Profiles*, London: DfT, Transport Studies Unit, University of Oxford.
- STANBRIDGE, K. (2002), *Residential Relocation*, Bristol: University of West of England.